

# Townhall Toolkit

A Conversation Guide  
for Leaders



Townhall with

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## DISCUSSION GUIDE

Maintaining mental fitness requires all hands on deck. You can change the conversation about mental fitness by supporting efforts that encourage connectedness, reduce isolation and increase help-seeking.

This toolkit encourages leaders to discuss barriers to mental fitness and how to cultivate more resilient teams. Leaders set the conditions for healthy workplaces where team members can thrive.

Use the below reflections and discussion prompts in your conversations about these video clips, then share what you have learned with your teammates.

### ■ Create Connections and Reduce Isolation (00:15)

| TOPIC  | REFLECT  | DISCUSSION PROMPTS   |
|--|--|--|
| Talking is the first step in connectedness and connection. Find commonality. Talking helps dispel the idea someone is alone or the only person experiencing these thoughts and feelings. | Leaders set the tone for how climates and cultures are developed and maintained. Are you a leader others come to or confide in for advice? | <p>Think about someone you know who excels at connecting with others and/or bringing people together.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How would you describe this person?</li> <li>What behaviors does this person model that you could adapt?</li> </ul> |

## ■ Serve as a Role Model to Promote Help-Seeking (03:44)

| TOPIC   | REFLECT   | DISCUSSION PROMPTS   |
|---|---|--|
| Talking about how support has benefited you and how important it is for others lends credibility to those services. Leaders who are empathetic make these conversations more accessible to Service members. In the same way teams maintain readiness, mental fitness should also be a priority. | Researchers are finding that empathy is the most important leadership skill in workplaces. How do you model the behaviors you want to see in teams? What does being an empathetic leader mean to you? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What should leaders say about help-seeking resources?</li> <li>What help-seeking resources do you know about or have used?</li> </ul> |

## ■ Recognize Common Challenges and Set the Example (10:47)

| TOPIC   | REFLECT   | DISCUSSION PROMPTS  |
|---|---|---|
| The mind, body and spirit are all equally important to feeling balanced. Recognizing and managing stressors is key to mental fitness. | The Marine Corps and Navy leadership principles are quite similar. They ask Marines and Sailors to be self-aware, seek self-improvement and set the example for others. They also specifically say leaders must know and look out for the welfare of their people. What actions or behaviors do you do to fulfill these principles? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are some of the common stressors for people in your career field?</li> <li>What do you do to manage stress in your life?</li> </ul> |

## ■ Build Leadership Skills to Guide Others through Adversity (15:51)

| TOPIC  | REFLECT  | DISCUSSION PROMPTS   |
|--|--|--|
| Leaders have the opportunity to engage Sailors and Marines early to mitigate the escalation of negative behaviors or challenges. This includes seeing to the welfare of teams and being an active listener to hear concerns. | What actions have you seen other leaders take to support the mental fitness of their team members? What worked well that you might replicate in future interactions? Think about a time where your resilience was lower than usual. What did others do to support you in these times? What actions were most helpful? Least helpful? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Talk about a time a leader set the example that you respected.</li> <li>What is a leadership trait you think all leaders should have? Why?</li> </ul> |

## ■ You Are The Solution (18:19)

| TOPIC   | REFLECT  | DISCUSSION PROMPTS   |
|---|--|--|
| Feeling personal connections is important for each of us. You can help save lives by engaging with your teammates and asking how they are doing. We each play a role in preventing suicide. | The person sitting to your left and your right know you and will know when something is different with you. How do you promote connection in your team? How do you recognize when a team member may be struggling? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What can you say to a team member you are concerned about?</li> <li>How do you define personal accountability?</li> </ul> |

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## Suicide Prevention Messaging: What to Say and What to Avoid

Leaders play a significant role in setting a positive culture and addressing negative behaviors before they escalate. When speaking about suicide and mental health, please consider these tips to communicate safely and more effectively.

- **The words you use matters. Say “died by suicide” or “death by suicide.”**  
 “Died by suicide” describes the outcome, instead of “unsuccessful attempt” or “committed suicide” which may be blaming toward the individual.
- **Focus on the facts of the event.**  
 Avoid personal details or descriptions of how or where a person died by suicide. Glamorizing the outcome of suicide may lead to group contagion. Do not show or describe suicide methods or locations.
- **The vast majority of people facing challenges find support.**  
 Do not portray suicidal behavior as more common than it is or as a typical way of coping with adversity. The vast majority of people who face adversity, mental illness, and other challenges—even those in high risk groups—do not die by suicide, but instead find support, treatment, or other ways to cope.
- **Suicide is preventable.**  
 Avoid language that suggests suicide is inevitable or unsolvable. Describing suicide as an “epidemic,” using terms like “bullycide,” or providing extensive statistics about suicide without solutions or action steps are examples of messaging that can make suicide seem too overwhelming to address.
- **Most, but not all people who die by suicide, exhibit warning signs.**  
 Avoid describing a suicide as inexplicable or without warning. Talk about the risk and protective factors associated with suicide as well as known warning signs.
- **Suicides result from a complex interplay of factors.**  
 Avoid attributing suicide to a single cause or circumstance (e.g., job loss, breakup, bullying, high stress, or being a military veteran, gay youth, or Native American).  
  
 Also avoid portraying suicide as having no cause. Describing suicidal behavior as the inexplicable act of an otherwise healthy or high-achieving person may encourage identification with the person who died and convey that suicide can’t be prevented.
- **Talk about mental wellness and fitness in the same way you talk about physical health.**  
 Messaging themes such as “breaking the stigma of mental illness” or other language that reiterates the extent to which stigma is a problem may serve to reinforce stigma, rather than countering it. Whereas, maintaining readiness and fitness is a daily commitment to professionalism and wellness.

### Adapted From:

**Leaders Suicide Prevention Safe Messaging Guide.** (2021). Washington, DC: Defense Suicide Prevention Office. Retrieved from [https://www.dspo.mil/Portals/113/Documents/DSPO\\_LSP\\_SafeMsgGuid%20\(Final\).pdf](https://www.dspo.mil/Portals/113/Documents/DSPO_LSP_SafeMsgGuid%20(Final).pdf)

**The Messaging “Don’ts”.** In Framework for Successful Messaging. Retrieved from <https://suicidepreventionmessaging.org/safety/messaging-donts>



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## Mental Wellness— Know the Signs

The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#) offers these warning signs that someone may be at risk:

- Talking about wanting to die or kill oneself
- Looking for a way to kill oneself
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live
- Talking about feeling trapped or being in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings

The risk is greater if the behavior is new, or has increased, and if it seems related to a painful event, loss, or change.

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*Reference to non-federal entities does not constitute or imply Department of Defense or Department of the Navy endorsement of any company or organization.*

## Where to Find Help

### MILITARY ONE SOURCE:

**Call:** 1-800-342-9647

**Chat:** <https://livechat.militaryonesourceconnect.org/chat/>

**App:** <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/>

Connects DoD Service members and military families to information, answers and support to help overcome challenges, reach goals and thrive.

### MILITARY CRISIS LINE:

**Call:** 1-800-273-8255, Press 1

**Text:** 838255

**Chat:** <http://veterancrisisline.net>

Confidential, available 24/7 for all Veterans, Service members, National Guard and Reserves, and their family members and friends.

### VET CENTERS:

**Call:** 1-877-WAR-VETS (1-877-927-8387)

Offers social and psychological services and professional counseling to Veterans, Service members, National Guard and Reserves, and their families.

### DoD SAFE HELPLINE:

**Call:** 1-877-995-5247

**Chat:** <https://safehelpline.org/live-chat>

**App:** <https://SafeHelpline.org>

Connects DoD Service members, their families and civilians to Sexual Assault Response Coordinators, Chaplains, military police, legal support, as well as local resources. Available 24/7.

### THE DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY CIVILIAN EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (DONCEAP):

**Call:** 1-844-DON-CEAP (1-844-366- 2327)

**TTY:** 1-800-635-2883

**Visit:** [MagellanAscend.com](https://MagellanAscend.com)

Provides confidential, free, and compassionate care and resources 24/7 for civilians and their families.





## Suicide Affects All People— Know the Facts!

Suicide is preventable. Each of us has a role to play in prevention. Know the facts about suicide. Do not ignore your stressors or wait for them to escalate. Pay attention to the signs for yourself and for your team. Seeking help is a commitment to professionalism and wellness. Do not struggle alone.

**There are many misconceptions about suicide in our society that may keep people from getting the help they need.**

1. **Talking about suicide does not give people the idea.** Knowing that someone is comfortable enough to discuss suicide can be a great relief for those suffering in silence. Talking about suicide signals to team members that no conversation is too tough to handle. For someone struggling, feeling a social connection means they are heard and their struggle is seen.
2. **Ask directly if you are concerned someone may be suicidal.** It takes courage to ask someone if they are thinking of taking their life. You may worry that you will offend the person or will not know how to respond. Remember that you do not have to have all of the answers if someone tells you they are considering suicide. Even stating, "I don't know . . ." is a powerful way to let someone know you will listen to them without judgment.
3. **Suicides are typically due to a complex set of factors that often develop over a number of years.** Contributing factors for Service members often include breakups or failed relationships, legal troubles, financial difficulties, work stress, and various types of trauma.
4. **Suicide is preventable; sometimes the simple act of reducing access to lethal means can save a life.** A lethal means is any instrument or object used to carry out a self-destructive act (i.e., firearms, medications, bridges, etc.). Reducing access to lethal means can help prevent suicide by building time and space between the impulse to act and the means to cause self-harm.
5. **The urge to die by suicide may be relatively short in duration—minutes to hours.** The safe storage of firearms and medications can provide sufficient time for working through a suicidal crisis.
6. **Individuals often have a preferred lethal means.** When that means is not available or easily accessible, research indicates people who are suicidal do not look for an alternate lethal means.

7. **A suicidal person may not want to die, but may not know how to live with the pain they are in.** Having conversations about suicide opens the door to talk about feelings of hopelessness and pain. In many cases people who are suicidal do not want to die but are in so much emotional pain that they do not know how to go on living.
8. **There are verbal and behavioral warning signs that may indicate a person is considering suicide.** Look for changes in the person's behavior and/or language such as increased rage or anger, depression, anxiety, feelings of guilt or shame, withdrawing from family and friends, giving away possessions, or neglecting their personal welfare and appearance. In some cases, a person who has been depressed or irritable will suddenly be happy—this may indicate that the person has created a plan to take their life and is relieved that they will soon have an end to their pain.
9. **The military suicide rate is roughly equivalent or lower than the U.S. population.** Researchers control for differences in age and sex between the military and the rest of the country to compare these two groups appropriately.
10. **Everyone has a role to play in preventing suicide.** Help looks different for each person. Peer-to-peer networks and may include peer-to-peer networks, chaplains, community resources, friends, family, and caregivers. Having helpful resources already programmed in your phone means you can reach out when you are not sure what to do—for yourself, for family, or a team member.

## Adapted From:

**Fuller, K. (2020, September 30).** *5 Common Myths about Suicide Debunked.* In National Alliance on Mental Illness. Retrieved from <https://www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/September-2020/5-Common-Myths-About-Suicide-Debunked>

**Leaders Suicide Prevention Safe Messaging Guide. (2021).** In Defense Suicide Prevention Office. Retrieve from [https://www.dspo.mil/Portals/113/Documents/Leaders%20Suicide%20Prevention%20Safe%20Messaging%20Guide\\_FINAL\\_508\\_LOW.pdf?ver=Pxsma29NRf5SEcSYN482Uw%3d%3d](https://www.dspo.mil/Portals/113/Documents/Leaders%20Suicide%20Prevention%20Safe%20Messaging%20Guide_FINAL_508_LOW.pdf?ver=Pxsma29NRf5SEcSYN482Uw%3d%3d)

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**National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention, Lethal Means Stakeholder Group. (2020).** *Lethal means & suicide prevention: A guide for community & industry leaders.* Washington, DC: Education Development Center. Retrieved from [https://theactionalliance.org/sites/default/files/lethal\\_means\\_and\\_suicide\\_prevention-a\\_guide\\_for\\_community\\_and\\_industry\\_leaders\\_final\\_1.pdf](https://theactionalliance.org/sites/default/files/lethal_means_and_suicide_prevention-a_guide_for_community_and_industry_leaders_final_1.pdf)